

## The Ability of The Fourth Semester Students in Constructing Passive Voice in Writing Explanatory Essay: A study at the English Department FBS UNP Padang

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### Abstract

This study is aimed to describe the ability of the fourth semester English department students at UNP, who are registered in 2015/2016 academic year, in constructing passive voice in writing explanatory essay. This study is also aimed to find out grammatical problems in constructing passive voice. This is a descriptive quantitative research. Proportional random sampling technique was used to determine the sample. The data were collected by using writing test with four alternative topics, one of which should be chosen. Students were asked to write passive sentences in their essay. Based on the findings of the research, it was found that students' ability in constructing passive voice is in average level. There are four common grammatical problems identified from the students' writing, which are grammatical problems related to the use of auxiliary *be* (22%), the use of past participle verb (46%), the agreement of subject and auxiliary (20%), and the choice of voice that should be used to construct the sentences (12%). V1, Ving, and incorrect form of past participle verb were used to replace the use of past participle verb in students' passive sentences. In addition, incorrect forms of auxiliary and missing auxiliary were found to be the students' problem. It was also found that students constructed active voice for sentences that should be written in passive voice since it is the subject that must receive the action.

**Key words/phrases:** *passive voice, explanatory essay, ability*

### A. INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the language skills that needs to be mastered. Through writing, people can express and share their ideas to the others. Writing is considered as an active process involving some steps to write an understandable and informative writing. In order to write a good writing, there are some aspects that need to be completed. The aspects are the ideas of the writing, the format of the writing, and the language used in writing.

In English department of Universitas Negeri Padang, the students are introduced to many kinds of writing some of which are texts from some different

genres. Besides the process of gathering and developing ideas for the writing, the students also need to pay attention to the general classification and language features of each text.

One of the aspects included in the language features of a text is grammar. Grammar is an important aspect in writing. The idea of the writing will be clearly understood by the readers through sentences which are grammatically correct. Thornburry (1999:1) states that “grammar is a description of rules that governs how a language’s sentences are formed and it attempts to explain why the sentences are acceptable”. Even though writing and grammar are learned separately, students have to apply the grammar knowledge in their writing. The students have to pay attention to the language features of the text some of which are related to grammar use.

After doing a preliminary research in which the researcher collected some explanatory essays written by third semester English department students of 2015 academic year, the researcher found that the students have problems in constructing passive voice in explanatory essay. In this case, there are some sentences in their explanatory essays that should be written in passive voice but the students construct the sentences in the active one and vice versa.

Another proof from preliminary research done by the writer is about problem in constructing passive voice related to the features of passive voice itself. A common form of passive voice is a combination of Subject + be + Past participle. Students used incorrect form of past participle verb. Some students wrote incorrect passive sentences.

In writing, it is important to make sure that the use of excessive passive voice will make the writing become unorganized. In this case, there are several situations when the use of passive voice is appropriate to be used. First, Passive voice is used when the speaker/writer wants to focus on person or thing acted on. Moaddab (2014:1415) states that passive voice is used in a situation in which the writer wants to emphasize the person or thing acted on. Furthermore, Azar (2002:208) adds some information that the use of passive voice is correct when the writer focuses on the subject of a sentence.

Constructing passive voice is quite complicated since there are several things that need to be considered. Since passive construction is quite complex, students

often have problems in constructing them. Parrot (2000:296) mentions common problems that students have when constructing passive voice. Students often have difficulties in choosing the correct auxiliary be for the sentence. The students sometimes do not know the past participle form of a verb. They often over generalize the rule of past participle verb that usually add by –ed ending. Students often leave the auxiliary be when constructing the passive sentence.

Brown (2007:263) states that inter lingual error and intra lingual error may cause problem in constructing sentences. As the students have problem in constructing passive voice, language transfer may be the source of the problems. According to Syarif (2016:388) language transfer refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from one language to another. In this case, students apply their knowledge of their native passive voice to English passive voice. The source of problems in constructing passive voice may be caused by inter-lingual problem. Intra-lingual problem may also occur when the students do not know about the language they are learning.

Since passive voice is an important aspect in explanatory essay which functions to organize the text, it is necessary to know students' ability in constructing passive voice in writing explanatory essay. This research is conducted to find out students' ability and grammatical problems in constructing passive voice in writing explanatory essay.

## **B. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study is classified into descriptive quantitative research because it attempts to see the way things are and involves collecting numerical data to answer question about subject of the study. This research is aimed to describe the fourth semester English department students' ability in constructing passive voice in explanatory essay. According to Gay (2012: 625), descriptive research requires the researcher to collect data in order to answer certain topics or people's opinion.

The population of this research is fourth semester English department students in 2015/2016 academic year. This research used proportional random sampling technique since there is different number of student in each class. According to Sugiyono (2014: 82), proportional random sampling was used to collect sample from a population in which the member of the population is not

homogenous. In addition, the group representations are suited to the number of member of each group.

In this research, the researcher chose 20% of the population or 32 students as the sample. The total number of the sample is 32 fourth semester English department students in 2015/2016 academic year. There are 5 students from K1 class, 5 students from K2 class, 5 students from K3 class, 5 students from K4 class, 6 students from NK1, and 6 students from NK2 class. Proportional random sampling technique was used to collect the sample. The data were collected by using writing test. Four topics were given to the students and they were asked to choose one of them. Students were asked to write passive sentences in their essay and the test was done in 90 minutes.

This research use content validity which means a test measures an intended content area. It is known that the fourth semester students have already studied explanatory essay and passive voice construction. In constructing the test, syllabus was used to validate the test. To get a reliable test, the researcher used the scoring rubric to judge and score students' passive sentences. The researcher only focused on the passive voices written in the students' writing.

The data were analyzed in the following steps. First, In order to judge the students' passive voice, rubric below is used:

Score/Category	Indicator
5/Excellent	>81% of all passive sentences are correct
4/Good	61-80% of all passive sentences are correct
3/Average	41-60% of all passive sentences are correct
2/Poor	21-40% of all passive sentences are correct
1/Very poor	<20% of all passive sentences are correct

In order to get the mean score of the data that represents the students' ability in constructing passive voice, the researcher used the formula from Sudjana:

$$M = \frac{\sum x}{N}$$

M = Mean score

N = Total number of subject

$\Sigma x$  = Total of all scores

In addition, to see the students' correctness and problems in passive voice, all passive sentences were stored. Then, they were checked and corrected.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Research Finding

After analyzing and giving score to students' passive sentences, the students are then categorized into five levels which are excellent, good, average, poor, and very poor level.

#### Students' score in constructing passive voice in explanatory essay

Student	Passive	Incorrect PV	Correct PV	Score
1	11	3	8	4
2	14	7	7	3
3	11	5	6	3
4	11	0	11	5
5	11	0	11	5
6	9	4	5	3
7	8	1	7	5
8	9	1	8	5
9	8	4	4	3
10	5	3	2	2
11	8	2	6	4
12	16	4	12	4
13	16	6	10	4
14	8	1	7	5
15	16	7	9	3
16	10	2	8	4
17	11	2	9	4
18	10	6	4	2
19	9	4	5	3
20	14	6	8	3
21	15	6	9	3
22	16	3	13	5
23	16	0	16	5
24	12	6	6	3
25	10	6	4	2
26	11	3	8	4
27	13	0	13	5

<b>28</b>	10	4	6	3
<b>29</b>	12	8	4	2
<b>30</b>	12	10	2	1
<b>31</b>	12	9	3	2
<b>32</b>	16	4	12	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Mean</b>				<b>3, 531 (Average)</b>

From the table above, it can be seen that the ability of fourth semester English department students in constructing passive voice is in average level (3, 531). Number of students in each level are shown in the table below:

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Number of student</b>
Excellent	8
Good	8
Average	10
Poor	5
Very poor	1

There are four grammatical problems found in students' passive voices. They are problems related to the use of V3, the use of auxiliary, the agreement of subject and auxiliary in passive voice, and the choice of voice that should be used to express the idea. Table 10 below shows the percentage of the four problems.

#### **Problems in Constructing Passive Voice**

<b>o</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
	The use of V3	55	46%
	The use of auxiliary be	27	22%
	The agreement of subject and auxiliary	25	20%
	Choice of voice	15	12%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

##### a. The Use of V3

It can be seen from the table above that the use of V3 got the highest number of problems found in students' passive sentences. From 122

grammatical problems, there are 55 or 46% of grammatical problems are caused by the incorrect use verb form to replace the v3.

Some students used V1 in their passive sentences. For examples they wrote: *The food come is break down by Saliva; Chocolate seeds have to be roast; The beans should be dry well; The crushed bottles are mix; The paper will be mix by certain chemical*

V-ing is also used to construct passive voices by the students in their writing. For examples they wrote:

*“The food is pushing down by the muscle; “The food is chewing”; The use of digital media to decrease the use of paper is using widely now”; “The papers are washing with chemicals”; etc.*

There are some students that tried to write V3 in their writing but the verbs are incorrect. For examples they wrote *“The beans are fermentated”* while the correct v3 is *fermented*; *“They are then putted”*, while the correct one is *put*; *“The beans are spreaded”* while *spread* is the correct form; *“Theliquid is mould”* while the correct form is *moulded* or *molded*; *“The nutrients are absorpted by the body”* while the correct form is *absorbed*; and *“The waste will be throwed out through anus”* while the correct form is *thrown*.

#### b. The Use of Auxiliary *be* and Auxiliary *have*

It can be seen form the table that the use of auxiliary *be* and auxiliary *have* is in the second place. Grammatical problem related to the use of auxiliary and auxiliary *have* took 22% from all of grammatical problems found in students' writing. Some students did not write auxiliary *be* in their passive sentences. For examples they wrote:

*“Chocolate have known by its sweet taste”; The beans dried outside”; “This liquid called chocolate liquor”; the beans brought to the factory”; It dried in the sun”; They then mixed with chemical”; “It can be dangerous if it just thrown away”, etc.*

In addition, it is found in students passive sentences that they wrote incorrect auxiliary *be* and auxiliary *have*. For examples, they wrote *“The food first is been chewing by the teeth”* instead of *“The food first is chewed by the teeth”* and *“The pods being cut down from the trees”*

instead of *“The pods are cut down from the trees”*. Related to the use of auxiliary in passive voice, there are sentences that used incorrect form of auxiliary, they are *“In the factory, there are a lot of waste papers having been collected”* and *“Then, melt the material that have been mixed by using melting machine”*. Auxiliary that should be used in the first sentence is *have*. Meanwhile, auxiliary *has* should be used in the second sentence since the subject is singular.

c. The Agreement of Subject and Auxiliary *be*

There are also some students who had grammatical problems related to the agreement of subject and auxiliary *be*. Grammatical problem related to the agreement of subject and auxiliary *be* took 20% from all of grammatical problems found in students' writing. The students wrote:

*“The blended product are ground”*, *“They was fermented”*, *“Chocolate seeds which have been fermented is dried with two hands”*, *“ The nutrients and the waste is separated”*, *“The beans is spreaded”*, etc.

d. The Choice of Voice that Should be Used

There are sentences that should be constructed in passive voice. Those passive sentences are considered incorrect because it should be the subject that must receive the action. Grammatical problem related to choice of voice that should be used took 12% from all of grammatical problems found in students' writing. The first sentence is *“The sorting paper will also determine the color and the type of paper that will produce”*. This sentence should be written in passive voice since the focus are the color and the type of paper and there is no actor in this sentence. Another example is *“The food is chewing so that it would be easy to be swallowed”*. Since the focus is *The food*, it is impossible that food does the activity of chewing so that the sentence should be written as *“The food is chewed”*.

## 2. Discussion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that the students' ability in constructing passive voice in writing explanatory essay is in average level (3,5%). Students' ability which is in average level might be caused by the students' lack understanding in constructing passive voice. This may be caused



by students' tendency to use active voice than passive voice in writing. Purnama (2014: 100) states that students are more familiar with active voice than passive voice so that it causes lack understanding to the students. Since students tend to use active voice than passive voice, they find it difficult to construct passive voice. Nevertheless, they can be categorized as students in intermediate or even advanced level. They are expected to produce written texts that use passive voice to organize the text.

In addition, the students' lack understanding might be caused by the complexity of the passive voice itself. Lecturers and teachers often find it difficult to teach passive voice to the students. Hinkel (2002: 1) states that teaching the function, the meaning, and the form of passive voice is one of the problems in L2 grammar. As a result, students also have difficulties about when to use passive voice and to construct passive voice. There are number of books that give explanation about the meaning, the use, and the form of passive voice. Also, many textbooks provide drills for some passive structures. However, students still have difficulties to construct passive voice when it comes to writing or speaking.

Moreover, this lack understanding in constructing passive voice causes problems related to the features of passive voice itself. The problems are the incorrect use of V3, the incorrect use of auxiliary *be* and auxiliary *have*, the agreement between subject and auxiliary *be* and auxiliary *have*, and the choice of voice that should be used to express the idea in a sentence.

Grammatical problems related to the use of V3 took 46% from all grammatical problems found in students' passive sentences. This may be due to overgeneralization and misinformation of the use of past participle verb in passive sentence. Rivandi (2012:4) finds that the major mistake that the students make is using the wrong use of past participle verb and it caused by overgeneralization and misinformation. From the findings, there are some students that cannot change words, which part of speech is noun, to the past participle verb. In addition, there are also overgeneralizations for some verbs. Students just added *-ed* ending to some verbs. There are also incorrect past participle verb due to students' misinformation. There are passive sentences that used Ving to replace the use of past participle verb. In short, a great

percentage of problems of the use of incorrect past participle verb in passive sentence might be caused by misinformation and overgeneralization.

In addition, grammatical problems related to the use auxiliary *be* and *have* took 22% from all grammatical problems found in students' passive sentences. This may be caused by omission and misinformation. Students leave or omit the auxiliary *be*. Related to misinformation, students used modal auxiliary *has* for sentences which subjects are plural. In addition, the students also used incorrect auxiliary *be*. For example, they wrote "*The food first is been chewing by the teeth*" instead of "*The food first is chewed by the teeth*".

There is 20% from all grammatical problems found in students' passive sentences related to the agreement of subject and auxiliary *be*. This may also be caused by misinformation. Students used plural to be in a passive sentence which subject is singular noun. Finally, there is only 12% from all grammatical problems found in students' passive sentences related to the choice of voice that should be used. This problem may be caused by students lack understanding about passive voice. It may be assumed that students do not know how and when to use passive voice. This problem may also be caused by language transfer where the students apply Bahasa Indonesia passive voice knowledge to construct English passive.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Students' ability which is in average level and problems they faced may be caused by the students' lack understanding of passive voice. Students are familiar with active voice rather than passive voice. They tend to use active voice in writing so that they face difficulties in constructing passive voice. Students may also think that constructing passive voice is not really complicated since they have to focus only on the passive verb which is the combination of auxiliary *be* and past participle verb. This problem may occur as the result of exercises provided by the lecturers which only focus on exercise drills for some passive structures. As the result, when it comes to writing, students rarely use passive voice and make errors since they do not know when and how to use passive voice.

Based on the findings of the research, some suggestions are proposed to the lecturers and teachers for getting the better result in learning and teaching passive voice in writing. The lecturers and teachers should not only provide the students

grammar exercise drill. The lecturers should use other kind of task, for example writing task, to improve students' grammar understanding. The lecturers and teachers should pay attention that there are similarities and differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia passive voice.

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